

CERTs

and the private sector

Though private-sector support has been crucial in establishing or sustaining some CERT programs, such help is still all too rare.

By David Wagman

Take away the money put up by local businesses, and the five-county Evansville, Ind., area might not have a Community Emergency Response Team program at all. That's because donations, grants and in-kind contributions worth \$8,000 from local businesses pay for almost all of the cost to train, equip and deploy CERT in Evansville. Plans are in the works to raise still more money from the business community for CERT starting later this spring.

The city knows its vulnerabilities. Evansville lies near two active earthquake faults and is also in the Midwest's Tornado Alley. Evansville business leaders agree that a major disaster will affect everyone, says Christine Martin, executive director of the Southwestern Indiana Disaster Resistant Community Corp.

Through a related organization, the Southwestern Indiana Disaster Recovery Business Alliance, 27 companies donate at least \$250 and as much as



Bttm. Chief Cliff Weaver, Evansville (Ind.) Fire Department

Classes for the Evansville, Ind., CERT are held at the Evansville Fire Training Center. The instructors are firefighter instructors, and the equipment is supplied by the South West Indiana Disaster Resistant Community Corp., a group of businesses in five southwest Indiana counties whose goal is disaster preparedness and mitigation.

\$2,500 annually to area disaster-preparedness efforts. This year, the DRBA earmarked \$2,000 for CERT. A local Toyota factory donated another \$5,000, and a community foundation approved a grant for \$1,000.

Still the exception

Unfortunately, the support shown by Evansville's business community for CERT remains the exception rather than the rule. While many businesses invest in internal emergency response teams to help their businesses and employees cope with disaster, the habit of corporately funding CERT isn't nearly so ingrained. One reason is that the public sector has generally not done a good job convincing business leaders that their employees should be active in their community's emergency response network, says Carrie Barnecut, an emergency services coordinator for the State of California.

CERT began in Los Angeles in 1983 as a way to teach search and rescue, first aid and other critical skills to civilians who could end up as first responders should a disaster overwhelm professional responders. Adopted first in California and later in Florida, the CERT concept in recent years has spread nationwide.

For some local emergency response agencies, tight operating budgets make it tough to fund CERT. Providing seven weeks of training and then equipment can cost \$85 to \$100 for each CERT volunteer. That tab, which typically excludes the cost of trainers, can strain some emergency response agency budgets, sources agree.

For other emergency agencies, mission creep is the issue as they work to blend homeland protection duties, weapons of mass destruction preparedness and anti-terrorism training with more traditional emergency response

tasks. Finding time and manpower for CERT training can be tough when responsibilities are on the rise.

Given both constraints, business community support for CERT can make a difference. Take ChevronTexaco, for example.

Proactive in the Bay Area

A major oil refiner, California-based ChevronTexaco is required to maintain an emergency response program. But the company also is proactive when it comes to safety in communities where it has facilities and where its workers live. The company offers \$500 to \$750 grants to employees who volunteer for community activities such as CERT. And Chevron, well before its 2001 merger with Texaco, actively supported San Francisco Bay Area CERT programs, committing corporate dollars and making in-kind contributions.

"We find it is much cheaper not to have an emergency," says Chris Wimmer, senior emergency preparedness specialist with ChevronTexaco Business and Real Estate Services, based in San Ramon, Calif.

In the early 1990s, Chevron paid for its San Francisco-based employees to complete a full CERT training program. Out of an estimated 700 employees who were eligible, 150 successfully completed the training. Chevron underwrote the cost of instructors from the San Francisco Fire Department, plus the cost of a training facility, dinner and equipment for its employees. The bill ran to around \$25,000, Wimmer recalls.

The training was a one-time push for Chevron, in part because Wimmer was stretched too thin, tasked with organizing and attending every class in addition to his day job. But with the goal of sustaining CERT and extending it throughout the Bay Area, Wimmer and Frank Lucier, who was then a CERT pioneer with the San Francisco Fire Department, decided Chevron should support train-the-trainer programs in Bay Area communities where it had employees.

Wimmer's role in this effort amounted to inviting professional emergency responders from those cities and towns to complete a one-week train-the-trainer program. Two train-the-trainer sessions took place in

1994 and 1995 for 50 to 60 people from around the San Francisco area. Chevron donated meeting space and paid for lunches. Expenses ran around \$2,000.

From this came the idea of sponsoring a regularly convening roundtable for community emergency response leaders. The roundtable would offer a venue for emergency leaders to meet and share ideas, but in a "neutral" setting. The neutrality was important, because CERT proponents wanted the roundtable to avoid jurisdictional, departmental and turf conflicts. Chevron donated meeting space for the roundtable, which, since its inception in 1996, has grown into the Bay Area Neighborhood Emergency Teams organization.

"Bay NET is unique," says Barnecut. The only organization of its kind in California, Bay NET "would not exist without ChevronTexaco continuing to support it," she says.

Bay NET's core idea is to give emergency preparedness planners from the 16 counties around the Bay Area a forum in which to meet and share ideas. Bay NET continues to hold three all-hazards disaster education workshops a year and has more than 150 active members from 65 organizations on its mailing list, Barnecut says. Workshop topics include promoting disaster mitigation and preparedness, providing worker's compensation for team members, and promoting the growth of citizen community disaster training.

"The idea is to network and to work regionally," she says.

Flexing BICEPP

To foster business support for CERT and other emergency preparedness programs, in 1983 former Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley created the Business and Industry Council for Emergency Preparedness and Planning, known as BICEPP. Since its inception, BICEPP-like programs have spread to other communities in California, to cities such as Cleveland (where it's supported by the Red Cross), and internationally to places like Japan and Ecuador.

Almost every member of the Los Angeles BICEPP has a professional interest or job responsibility in emergency response or recovery, says Robert

G. Lee, the group's secretary and a principal in Borden/Lee Consulting. The core message behind BICEPP is that every employee has a responsibility to ensure his or her company's survival. Making sure that employees have adequate emergency training reduces the degree to which a company must rely on outside help in the event of a disaster. A company may elect to support a CERT program for its employees, investing in time, training and equipment.

One city that's still early in its efforts to draw businesses into the CERT concept is Peoria, Ill. Later this spring, city council members are expected to be asked to consider a resolution endorsing CERT. Once that happens, proponents hope that local businesses, including construction equipment manufacturer Caterpillar, moving and storage company Federal Warehouse and local utility CILCO, will decide to fund CERT in much the same way businesses in Evansville do.

Peoria's business leaders are creating a public-private partnership to support CERT, says Lynn Linder, development coordinator for the Heart of Illinois Project Impact, a CERT sponsor. She said the local business community realizes that CERT has proved its usefulness elsewhere in mitigating disasters.

Being good

One key to securing business involvement in CERT programs is corporate culture. At ChevronTexaco, a history of community involvement has given community service a real value, which is then backed up in some cases with grant money to support employee volunteerism.

"Businesses often look for opportunities to look good in their community, rather than being good in their community," says Chris Wimmer. Knowing that bad things can happen led ChevronTexaco and other companies to embrace emergency preparation and disaster response training well beyond the front gates of their facilities.

Convincing other companies to do the same is one of the next challenges for CERT advocates. **HPP**

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